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The Benefits of 'Nature' as a Tool in Improving Mental Health and Maintaining Psychological Well-being: An Ecological Dynamics Analysis.

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Doctoral Colloquium: Thursday 14th July 2016.



Outline

- ❖ Research Brief
- ❖ Defining Key Terms
- ❖ Theoretical Background
- ❖ Therapeutic Landscapes
- ❖ Ecological Dynamics
- ❖ Potential Pilot Study & Research Questions
- ❖ References



Current Position

❖ My Background

❖ Research Brief:

Explore the impacts of green and blue spaces as alternatives to traditional therapeutic landscapes used within formal counselling or psychotherapy



Defining Key Terms

'Mental Health'

“Mental Health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”

(World Health Organisation, 2014)

'Mental Disorders'

“Mental disorders comprise a broad range of problems, with different symptoms. However, they are generally characterised by some combination of abnormal thoughts, emotions, behaviour and relationships with others”

(World Health Organisation, 2016)

'Nature'

“The phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and products of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations”

(Oxford Dictionary, 2016)



Theoretical Background

❖ Theories

- **Biophilia**
(Fromm, 1964; Wilson, 1984)
- **Attention Restoration Theory**
(Kaplan & Talbot, 1983)
(Berto, 2005)
- **Topophilia**
(Tuan, 1974)
- **Gaia Theory**
Proposed by James Lovelock
(Margulis & Sagan, 1993)

❖ Evidence

- **Health:**
Cancer; immune system
(Li et al, 2008)
- **Mental Health:**
Depression; Anxiety; Self-esteem
(Chalquist, 2009)
- **Green space:**
Stress; Self-esteem
(Peacock et al 2007)
- **Blue space:**
Well-being
(Miller et al, 2012; Volker & Kistemann, 2011)



Therapeutic Landscapes

“places which have attained an enduring reputation for achieving physical, mental and spiritual healing”

(Gesler, 1993:171).

- ❖ Gesler examined the healing and health promoting attributes of natural and built environments within a framework that considered their social and symbolic importance as well as their physical effects on the human body and mind. (Curtis,2010)
- ❖ Fits with theories such as Biophilia, Attention Restoration and Topophilia
- ❖ However, places may be healing for one person and not be for another (Williams, 2007).



Ecological Dynamics

- ❖ Based on the theories of Ecological Psychology and Dynamical Systems
- ❖ Constraints are factors which can relate to the individual, task or environment and affordances are opportunities for behaviour
- ❖ Considers how an individual interacts with the environment and what may constrain this interaction

Example

Natural environment of a mountain affords opportunity for behaviour of climbing but this to understand natural phenomena, when applied to human behaviour it views the task performer as a complex, neurobiological system which is composed in turn gives opportunities for psychological behaviours such as anxiety or elation. (Brymer, Davids & Mallabon, 2014).



Individual

Allergies

Level of affiliation with nature

Previous experience

Personality type



Environmental

Natural light

Smells e.g. cut grass

Sounds e.g. bird song

Trees to provide shade

Social



Task

Confidentiality

Change in therapist/client dynamic

Time away

Set goals

These factors can afford behaviour or constrain it

Potential Pilot Study & Research Questions

Outline:

- ❖ Online survey of therapists



United Kingdom



Norway



Japan

Methodology:

- ❖ Online questionnaire, questions based around affordances and constraints.

Justification:

- ❖ Few studies have investigated how widespread nature-therapy is
- ❖ It will be interesting to look at the United Kingdom's results alongside two countries who have national philosophies of outdoor living

Impact:

- ❖ This will give a snapshot of the use of nature-therapy and may identify why therapists are not using it

- ❖ **What are the benefits of outdoor therapy?**

Conduct case studies of adults and children receiving outdoor therapy in the UK.
This has not been done before using ecological dynamics

- ❖ **Can nature therapy provide long term coping mechanisms?**

There is limited research into the long term effects of nature-therapy

- ❖ **Are representations of nature enough?**

Would people prefer a nature-themed therapy room over a traditional one if given the choice?
Less postoperative anxiety if looking at pictures of open water (Ulrich and Lunden, 1990).
Faster recovery from surgery if a view of a natural setting than an urban one (Ulrich, 1984)



Any Questions?

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References: Images

❖ Cover/background image:

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❖ Woman on ecological dynamics diagram:

King of Wallpapers (2016) *Woman* [online] Available at: <http://kingofwallpapers.com/woman.html> [Accessed 2 July 2016]

❖ Chinese garden on ecological dynamics diagram:

I like wallpaper (2016). *Chinese Garden Scene* [online] Available at: <http://www.ilikewallpaper.net/ipad-wallpaper/Chinese-Garden-Scene/24446> [Accessed 1 July 2016]

❖ Women on ecological dynamics diagram:

Getty Images (2016) *Two Women Hiking* [online] Available at: <http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/video/shot-of-girls-hiking-in-wood-land-kastel-staad-stock-video-footage/450896053> [Accessed 30 June 2016]

❖ Counselling Scene

London North West Healthcare (2016) *Genetics* [online] Available at: <http://www.lnwh.nhs.uk/services/a-z-services/g/genetics/> [Accessed 30 June 2016]

❖ Psychiatrist's Office

Two Ice Floes (2016) *Therapy Room* [online] Available at: <http://twicefloes.com/taking-apart-psychiatry-fraud-kings-of-the-mind/> [Accessed 29 June 2016]

❖ Therapy Room

Angela Kays (2016) *Therapy Room* [online] Available at: <http://www.angelakays.co.uk/> [Accessed 28 June 2016]

❖ Paediatrician's Room

Pinterest (2016) *Paediatrician's Room* [online] Available at: <https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/300263500128333778/> [Accessed 28 June 2016]

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Andrew Watson (2016) *Derwent Water Sunset* [online] Available at: <https://m.flickr.com/#/photos/andrewwatson/8169> [Accessed 28 June 2016]